

NEW WEAPONS PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE FOR MARINES DEALING WITH NON-COMBATANTS

By Sgt. Jason J. Bortz

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. (Aug 28) -- Non-lethal weapons, such as acoustic and directed energy weapons, can provide Marines with an alternative way to deal with noncombatants in a way that can reduce injuries and fatalities on both sides, and still accomplish set objectives and missions.

An important factor with non-lethal weapons is reversibility. Traditional weapons leave a lasting effect, often resulting in crippling injuries and death. Non-lethal weapons should have effects on personnel which can be reversed with the passage of time. Weapons that cause conditions ranging from: temporary disorientation, to pain, or loss of consciousness, are desired.

For the last two years, the Marine Corps has been experimenting with the possibility of using non-lethal weapons in combat situations to reduce casualties.

Non-lethal weapons are defined by the Department of Defense policy as discriminate weapons that are explicitly designed and employed to incapacitate personnel or material, while minimizing fatalities and collateral damage to property and the environment.

Non-lethal weapons are not expected to reduce casualties or permanent injuries to zero, but they will significantly reduce fatalities or injuries compared to traditional military weapons. With that said, there is always the possibility some fatalities could result from the employment of non-lethal weapons.

There has been an increase in the number of wars fought in an urban environment. That suggests the enemy will be located among the civilian population and will use civilian non-combatants as "shields." In the battle of Hue City, during the Vietnam war, 54 to 70 percent of personnel killed were non-combatants caught in the action. "In an urban environment, cluttered with non-combatants, it is better to make them temporarily uncomfortable, even if lingering effects are inflicted on a small percentage, than to kill a large percentage," said Col. Gary W. Anderson, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab.

Urban operations may also have civilian populations who can turn hostile and rise against our forces or commit violent acts such as rioting or looting. These situations can often happen quickly with little or no warning and pose a serious threat to mission accomplishment. Under these situations, identifying the enemy

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is difficult and the use of deadly force for purposes other than self-defense may not be allowed because of rules of engagement.

Non-lethal weapons increase the number of options available to commanders in situations where using deadly force is restricted. They offer flexibility by allowing U.S. forces to apply military force with reduced risk of serious noncombatant casualties.

Marines will receive extensive training with non-lethal weapons so a commander or platoon sergeant will be able to make a quick and accurate decision whether to use non-lethal weapons or traditional military weapons. A resident Non-Lethal Individual Weapons Instructors Course is projected to stand up at the Marine Detachment, Fort McClellan, Ala., in October 1998.

Non-lethal weapons are still in the early stages of development. The weapons must be evaluated by appropriate authorities to be sure they comply with the laws of war, as well as being socially acceptable. These weapons must meet requirements with all arms control treaties that the United States has signed.

Some of the non-lethal weapons being looked at are 12 gauge shotgun shells that have a bean bag inside of it. The round can be fired from a standard 12 gauge shotgun and is not intended to cause any permanent damage or fatality to a person. There is an epoxy mix that comes in a plastic bag that dries in several minutes and can seal doors. A 40mm foam rubber tipped round that can be fired from a M203 and can knock an average size man down. Another item being looked at is a directed energy weapon that uses low frequency soundwaves that can knock a person out but causes no permanent damage.

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